

# The Seattle Times

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Dear Judges,

In the past five years, homelessness in and around Seattle spiked by 40 percent even as the region enjoyed a historic boom in tech jobs and construction. For locals and even for tourists, images of tent camps dotting the lush greenbelts alongside freeways and parks have become as characteristic of the city as salmon or cedars. The region has the third-largest homeless population in the nation, behind just New York and Los Angeles. As public and private spending on homelessness surged, a roiling civic debate has been joined by the city's traditionally liberal leaders, housing advocates, business titans and neighborhood activists, each constituency set against a growing sense of compassion fatigue.

The Seattle Times joined the debate in late 2017 with Project Homeless, a community funded project tasked with a mission to explain the complex causes of the crisis, watchdog spending and responses by government and non-profit organizations and spotlight potential solutions.

The impact of coverage has already been seen in large and small shifts. Coverage of the diffuse and loosely coordinated homeless response prompted the new Seattle mayor to tally, for the first time, spending scattered across six agencies, and the mayor and the King County executive noted our coverage in formally agreeing to merge their services. Seattle's budget for 2019 filled gaps in homeless services which had been featured in Project Homeless stories, including a dearth of designed parking spots for the estimated 3,370 vehicles countywide used as homes. An accounting of regional homeless spending by Project Homeless has become the de facto number cited by leaders, and solutions stories – including an analysis of San Francisco's crack down tent camps – have broadened civic discourse.

At the state level, our investigative story on state money flowing into the pocket of a slumlord prompted one state agency to cut off a contract, and another to launch a still-ongoing review of their policies. Housing advocates credited Project Homeless' coverage of a casualty in fight over an infrastructure budget – a housing project for homeless veterans - with the budget's subsequent swift passage. Gov. Jay Inslee's proposed budget for 2019 echoes Vancouver, B.C.'s work to reduce the cost of new affordable housing, which was spotlighted in a solutions story.

In the private sector, the president of Microsoft said Project Homeless coverage “got us focused” and helped lead to a historic \$500 million pledge by the company to address local housing affordability gaps.

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The sustained focus on homelessness in the Seattle area has heightened accountability, produced budget and policy changes and injected solutions from across the country into the local civic discourse. Please consider it for the Headliner award in public service journalism.

Sincerely,  
Ray Rivera  
Deputy Managing Editor